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ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW:

In December of 1975, Hit Parader magazine published an exclusive conversation between interviewer Lisa Robinson and John Lennon. Topics included The Beatles, Allen Klein (the group's controversial replacement for manager Brian Epstein), the recent separation of John and Yoko, and Lennon's pending deportation case with the US government.

At the time of this interview, John was fighting to remain in the United States. An immigration judge had found that Lennon could not claim permanent residence in the US (due to a British marijuana conviction in 1968) and authorized Lennon to leave voluntarily within 60 days of the March 1973 decision. Lennon appealed the decision to the Board of Immigration Appeals. In 1975 that appeal was still pending before the United States Circuit Court of Appeals in New York.

- Jay Spangler,
www.beatlesinterviews.org

Q: "What is the situation with your deportation case?"

JOHN: "Well, It's hellish really. I don't know where to start. It's going on the same as before-- for me it's the same. They've taken the stance that I have to leave. They always say 'Thirty days' but that passed a month ago. They say that once a year. It's so complicated. It started out because I had a British conviction for possessing marijuana-- which was planted by Sgt Pilcher-- which everybody in England knows now because the guy's in jail... not for my case though, for somebody else's case. Also, at first they jumped on both Yoko and me, although they always kept insisting that they were treating us like normal citizens who had misdemeanor cases against them. Then they suddenly found out halfway through the case that there was no case against Yoko. She was never convicted because the guy said, 'I'll let Yoko off if you plead guilty-- if you cop a plea I'll let her go.' And we weren't married then. It was a bit weird in England. I won't even go into the whole story how we were

busted. We were busted by about 20 people. There were dogs... it was a whole film. They busted us in the morning-- they wouldn't even let us get dressed. It took them hours, and there was a question in the Houses of Parliament as to why so many people were needed to arrest two people."

Q: "No one ever advised you to fight the thing initially?"

JOHN: "No. I was just panic stricken. I was a wreck. Aaahh! Cops! In jolly England! You know, I still half-believed about the good old bobby helping you down the street. And I was really nervous about Yoko 'cuz we'd just got living together, and it was all public. And I thought they'd deport her so I copped a plea thinking it would be a misdemeanor. I figured what the hell, it's just a hundred pounds... it's just crazy, and it's been going on since 1971. The first conviction came down in 1973-- they said I had to leave... couldn't be a permanant resident of the United States with a British conviction. Now all the people involved are gone-- the prosecution councel and the head of immigration. We've just received permission to interview them, to question them about papers. I also found out that Senator Strom Thurmond sent a letter to John Mitchell when he was Attorny General. Thurmond was the head of a congressional committee, and whether we'll get our hands on it I don't know. But it said in essence, this guy's looking to stay here and we suggest no. And our lawyers always said that the instructions for Lennon's case are coming from Washington. And the New York people kept insisting it was a local case. But we knew it wasn't just a local case, and this letter from Thurmond could prove it. Just like we knew when we were wiretapped. But how do you prove that? We knew we were being wiretapped on Bank Street. There was a helluva lot of guys coming in to fix the phones... and there were two guys outside who kept following me around in a car. I went on the Dick Cavett show and said it... this is long before Watergate... and people just thought, 'Oh crazy Lennon. Whose gonna bother following him? What an egomaniac.' But we had been associated with Jerry Rubin and John Sinclair and little rallies, and were seen around those people. It really was like a mini-Watergate."

"You know, incidentally, there was a CBS documentary I saw last week about Nazis in America. Allowed, known Nazis who are here. Famous Nazis who killed people from 15,000 up. And the guy who was prosecuting me got taken off my case and put onto this Nazi thing. On TV he said that someone in his office, in the immigration department, had stolen his file on Nazis from the file in his office. Meaning that someone in his own group is protecting these people. They're so busy protecting them, but they're attacking me. I mean, there was a list of Nazis as long as

your arm, and one of them was holding a service in Congress at one time. It's just ludicrous. It's Kafka."

Q: "Why then, do you want to live here."

JOHN: "Because it's the same everywhere. Name somewhere where it's different. It's not as if it's a choice between living here or in England where it's different. It's the same in England on a different level, and the Americans and the English are hand in glove. Whatever the game is, it's the same game. It's really a choice between living in the West or the East, but I'm West and I don't want to live in the East. America and England to me are almost very similar places. Maybe you can't see it if you're living in England."

Q: "How frustrating is all of this to you emotionally?"

JOHN: "At one time it was getting to be a bug because I had to keep going to court, and it got to be a way of life as court cases do. It was hassling me, because that was when I was hanging out with Elephant's Memory, and I wanted to rock-- to go out on the road. But I couldn't do that because I always had to be in New York for something... and I was hassled. I guess it showed in me work. But whatever happens to you happens in your work. So while on the surface I tried to make it appear as if I were making a game out of it, trying not to take it seriously, there were periods of paranoia. Even my friends would say, 'Come on John... what do they want with you?'"

"And you know, I see now where Jane Fonda is suing the governemnt for millions, and when I first heard that I thought, 'Aha!' d then 'Uh-oh' ...like, if they left me alone would they be afraid I'd make a fuss and start suing after. I guess it's probably going to have to be the president who decides-- a pure political decision when my paper comes up, as it does every now and then-- into his consciousness."

Q: "Is the president aware of this?"

JOHN: "Oh, you bet. I had a friend who visited there, right? I mean you can't have one junkie in the White House and kick another out, can you? That's being flippant of course. Neither of us are junkies. Anyway. They keep falling back on that law about misdemeanors, and it's some trip to change the law here. Even though in England that law has been reversed."

Q: "But they could get around it."

JOHN: "Of course they can, because they've got around it for the Nazis, for big dope dealers... big heroin-heavy-stuff dealers. My lawyer has a list of people... hundreds of people in here who got

around the law for murder, rape, double murder, heroin, every crime you can imagine. People who are just living here. I want it to end, but I can go on as long as they go on. It'll probably go on until it gets to the Supreme Court."

Q: "How much of your time is spent on this?"

JOHN: "Well, when I'm not talking about it, I think about it occasionally. I mean, it's on my list of lawsuits. I was just talking about it with Yoko last night-- there seems to be an awful lot of lawsuits involved with rock and roll."

Q: "There's Allen Klein, right?"

JOHN: Yes, that's about twenty-- He's suing me, and Yoko, and all the ex-Beatles, and everybody that ever knew them! And he's suing me individually, me collectively, any version of me you can get hold of is being sued. But immigration is the important one-- the others are all just money, somehow a deal will be made. Immigration, that's the one. I mean, if they can take Helen Reddy, they can take me..."

Q: "Would you want to become a US citizen?"

JOHN: "I'm too involved with this to think about citizenship. I'd prefer to do a P. G. Wodehouse. I found out before he was knighted that he was living here (America), and I thought well, that's cool. Nobody thinks P. G. Wodehouse is not English. He was English until his last breath and he lived on Long Island. And that suits me fine. I'm English but I want to live here. And the funny thing about America is that there's almost no such thing as American. You go on the streets and everybody's Italian or Irish or Israeli or English or Jamaican or Nigerians... and if you go out into the sticks you've got the German group or the Dutch group and the names tell you which race dominates. It's just a pack of Europeans living here with Africans, Indians, and Asians thrown in. Thousands of Chinese, Japanese... It's like the old gag about the melting pot."

"I always liked Liverpool and London-- places like that had alot of different races living in them. You could go to Soho and see all kinds of races on earth and I like that, but there's even more of a mixture here. My ideal is to be able to travel, that's the thing I really miss most. I miss England, Scotland, Wales, all that sentimental stuff... but I also miss France, Holland... Germany I haven't been to for years. I'd like to go to South America. I've never been. I'd like to be based here, and just travel."

Q: "Do you ever think you'll be so overcome with all the legal hassles that you'll get like Lenny Bruce and become obsessed with learning the law?"

JOHN: "No. I got obsessed with the politics for awhile... but law is, well... I could never take it that seriously. At a certain point I would just see the funny side of it and say fuck it. The worst that happens with most of these lawsuits is that they'll take more money off of me, and the worst that would happen with immigration is that I'd have to move."

Q: "Where would you move? I've heard rumors of Canada."

JOHN: "No. They always say that because whenever I go to Canada the Canadians as me if I like Canada, So I say yes, I like Canada-- I like Montreal and Toronto. I don't know the rest of it-- and the next minute they say I'm going to live there. And they always ask, 'Have you ever thought of living here?' Well, every country I've ever been to I've thought, 'Could I live here...'"

Q: "If you attempted to be a US citizen, would it be easier or more difficult because of your present status?"

JOHN: "Well, unless I get rid of this thing I can't even consider it I mean, if I can't get a green card, no way can I be a citizen. Not with a misdemeanor. See, the law in England has changed since the time when all rockstars were busted-- that tricky law where 'you' were responsible if 'this building' had it in it-- you were responsible if you owned the building. No possession, I never had any stuff on me. It was mysteriously found in the building, in the apartment. I think they've wiped the slate clean and it's retroactive in England, but not here."

Q: "What can people do about this?"

JOHN: "Well, the English really can't do anything, except those that care to could write to the American Embassy. The thing with politicians and ambassadors is that if they get one letter they count it as twenty. One letter keeps them aware, it keeps them realizing about it. But it's really a bore for me and I'm sure a bore for people listening about it..."

Q: "Does it help when you have a hit album-- keep a high profile, so to speak?"

JOHN: "Well, you see more of me if I've got a product to sell, it's as simple as that. Unless I feel like goofing around to a few openings with friends or hanging out in the 'rock biz.' But when you;ve got a product out you have to be seen or they'll forget. This sort of thing reminds the powers that be of me and what I represent."

Q: "Can that work against you?"

JOHN: "No. No, because power is power. Whatever power I have they're aware of it. Power doesn't frighten power, it makes them respect it-- that's their business. You've got the bomb, we've got the bomb. Everything's okay. If you aint got the bomb you don't even get a look-in. So I'm always aware of keeping my bomb, you know. Even though I blow it a few times, I always manage to put my bomb back together again, because that power is necessary. It's not good if I don't put records out and become invisible and go away, because then they come out and say nobody gives a dmn... people have forgotten about you."

Q: "Let's just say that there's a happy ending to all of this, and there comes a day when you're knighted, or the Academy Awards brings you back to receive a special award. What would your reaction be? Would you tell them to fuck off?"

JOHN: "Well, there will be a happy ending. But I have no idea what I'll do at age 70 or 80 like Charlie Chaplin, or P. G. Wodehouse. I don't really know his story but there was something weird about him and being captured in France by the Nazis and doing broadcasts. And I think that was one of the reasons he left, although he was forgiven. But the real official forgiveness was when they knighted him last year, and he died happy, right? So... I'm not really interested if I get knighted when I'm seventy. I'll deal with it when it comes. I want it now-- not the knighthood-- I'll take the green card, and a passport, and the cash I earn in the band in my own name. And I'll let my music, or my art, speak for me. If they give me knighthood at age 70 I'll deal with it then. Sir John..."

Q: "To turn to your music for a moment, what happened at Madison Square Garden when you were to have performed with George Harrison? Is it true that Klein had the place staked out with subpoenas?"

JOHN: "Well, Klein was chasing George all over New York. George was running down back elevators. I mean, Ringo won't come to New York. I live here so I get ALL the papers, and I'm always doing depositions. See, at the time he was doing his concerts we were also finalizing the Apple papers. And what actually happened was that at the last minute I wouldn't sign it. Actually my astrologer said it wasn't the right time to sign it. George got a little angry with me for not signing it, and he decided to finish the tour as he started it. That was cool by me, because I'd just done Elton, but I didn't want to do George... because it was expected. But he probably made the right decision. I saw him afterward, at the party."

Q: "Was it true that you or the McCartney's were denied a backstage pass?"

JOHN: "Well, there was some funny business... but you know I like him. I love him, we're alright. I don't really want to make a big deal about it. The thing is just that the business was always interfering with pleasure. It was hard to deal with each other anyway, because I had seen alot of Paul and Ringo in the last two or three years-- Paul always comes to New York, or I see Ringo in L.A.-- but I hadn't seen George. And not only were we trying to talk to each other not having seen each other in three years-- all that time only vaguely communicating through lawyers-- we tried to communicate in a hotel. I hung around the hotel for a few days, but it was hard. And then I didn't turn up on the day that I was supposed to sign this agreement. But I finally did sign it, in Disneyland. I wanted to go over it one more time.And I had already seen the concert in Nassau so I wasn't really planning to go to Madison Square Garden anyway. I don't really enjoy sitting in shows, whosoever they are, because you either have to go backstage with all that hassle, or sit in front where you get all that looking at you. I know Mick (Jagger) and everybody's always doing it, but it wears the shred out of me. There's not that many people I want to see in concerts. I'd only go because they're friends, you know. I prefer records, I always did. It's like watching a painter paint... just give me the painting."

Q: "Do you have any plans to perform in concerts on your own?"

JOHN: "Well, performing's not my greatest kick. I had fun with Elton, but that's just because it was Elton. He was really more nervous that I was, because he was nervous for me. I think he felt 'Poor old bugger, maybe he'll collapse.' I don't know... It was just a weird feeling being up there alone, but I knew Elton, and I knew the band, and it was just a one off thing. Don't expect to see me all over the place. I promised him if 'Whatever Gets You Through The Night' got to number one, I'd go one with him-- little thinking that it would. I might do odd TV, or TV specials where I can control the thing... like in the studio. See, I like to see it. I like to HAVE something afterwards. After the concert you don't get anything-- you either get cash or a headache. I hate live albums really, even though I've put a couple out."

Q: "What did you think of George's shows?"

JOHN: "Well, I saw the one without Ravi (Shankar) because he had had a heart attack. But I don't know... that night the band really cooked. The show I saw was a good show. My personal opinion was that even though I know what George was trying to do, I don't think it worked with Ravi... I mean I'm no one to say what works and what doesn't work really, but my personal opinion just was that he would have been better without. I think Ravi's great, but it might have been better to keep Ravi separate.

I want to see George do George. I'm with the kids... whether it's George Beatle or George Ex-Beatle."

Q: "Do you think that he's so deeply involved with the Eastern thing that he can't separate that that was George being George-- that he really can't do the rock and roll thing effectively anymore?"

JOHN: "Well, he's just cut off, really. It's easy to get cut off. If you're surrounded by people who aren't rocking, then you just forget what it is. And he is so inolved in the Eastern trip... you know, if you don't listen to the radio, know who the current artists are, the lastest record... if you switch off from that you don't know what people listen to, which happened to me in England! I just suddenly decided because 'Whatever Gets You Through The Night' didn't even crawl around in England... so I said 'Send me a tape of the top ten,' and it's nowhere like America. I was just, 'My God, three years!' I had no idea what was going on there. Now I get them to send it over every few months... It all seems to go Boom-da-da, Boom-da-da, Boom-da-da."

"The album did alright, it could have done better. It would help if I was more visible there, but I can't be. And the TV is sewn up-- You can't get on the TV unless you're on the charts and you can't get on the charts unless you're on the TV. The BBC came over here and filmed me. I guess they figured that the single would jump into the (British) top twenty. But it didn't, it fell over... so they didn't use the film. 'Number Nine Dream' is doing a bit better I hear, so that gives you a clue. I think they're going to like the rock and roll oldies album better than anything, because that's what they seem to be playing over there. But they're doing it a bit tongue-in-cheek I think. I did it for real."

Q: "Do you think that there would be tremndous excitement if you went back to England now? Hysteria?"

JOHN: "No. There was no hysteria when I was living there so why should there be now. I mean, the Beatles nostalgia and getting back together bit goes on as much here as it does there, maybe more... are you kidding? I do alot of radio when I have an album out-- and all the people who call up want to know WHEN ...from Minnesota to Los Angeles to New York... to the hippest and coolest, they want to know when and if and what it's gonna be like. All hysteria is manufactured anyway. At the 'Sgt Pepper' opening it was announced, 'He's going to be there,' so it was bloody Beatlemania going on. I got a fright because I really didn't know what I was letting myself in for. I got the deja vu, as they say, because it was bloody 'Hard Day's Night.' But that's because it had been manufactured, and it was 'Sgt Pepper' and they

probably expected all four. Ever since George did Bangla Desh they expect everybody to come on with him."

Q: "Why are there so many lawsuits?"

JOHN: "Ask any rockstar about lawsuits. And the more money there is, the more lawsuits there are, the bigger the artist, the more suits. I mean, people sue for anything-- that bloody fan with the Instamatic who sued me for hitting her.. I never touched her, never went near the girl... in the Troubador, the famous Troubador incident. She sued me, and I had to pay her off to shut her up. That happens all the time, she just wanted money. People sue you if you bump into them on the street. I do admit to chasing some weird people around, but she was not in the scene."

Q: "Weird people?"

JOHN: "Well, I was not in the best frame of mind, and I was wildly drunk. But I was nowhere near this chick. She's got no photographs of me near her. It was my first night on Brandy Alexanders, and they tasted like milkshakes. The first thing I knew I was out of my gourd-- of course Harry Nilsson was no help feeding them to me, saying 'Go ahead John.' It is true I was wildly obnoxious, but I definitely didn't hit this fat broad who just wanted to get her name in the paper, and a few dollars."

Q: "Doesn't all this wear you down?"

JOHN: "Well, I've just come out of it. Last year, with me personal life and the Apple business, the Klein business, and the immigration business... I mean, you don't want to admit it while it's happening that that's what's making you go balmy-- you're still living everyday and you think you're just going to a party, then you end up throwing up in the toilet. Everything was excessive, and you're not quite in control of yourself-- you can't lie back with the hangover and say, 'Now why did this happen to me...'"

Q: "It's surprising that it didn't get to you more."

JOHN: "Well, that was enough. I just woke up in the middle of it and thought, "There's something wrong here. I better straighten myself out.' After I deal with this last batch of lawsuits I aint gonna have anymore. I don't know how they happen-- one minute you're talking to someone, the next minute they're suing you."

Q: "As far as your personal life is concerned, you seem ecstatic to be back here with Yoko..."

JOHN: "Well I am. It's like-- and this is no disrespect to anybody else I was having relationships with--- but I feel like I was running around with me head off, and now I got me head back on. Yoko and I were always in touch, either on the phone or in one way or another. I just sort of came home is what happened. It's like I went out to get a coffee or a newspaper somewhere and it took a year-- like Sinbad. I went on a boat and went around the world and had a mad trip, which I'm glad is over. Yoko and I have known each other for nine years, which is a long friendship on any level. It was a long year, but it's been a nine year relationship, a seven year marriage. Maybe it was the seven year crutch. And apart from the pain we caused each other it probably helped us. We knew we were getting back together it was ust a matter of when. We knew-- everybody else might not have, but we did."

Q: "Actually, there wasn't that much press attention to the separation as one might have expected."

JOHN: "Well I read more about myself than you probably do, and I'll tell you there was. I mean, they would catalogue everyone you went around with, and things like, 'Lennon In Florida Trip' ...things like Rona Barrett wrote that Yoko was living with my ex-wife in a 'strange relationship.' She was putting that around... we got the clippings and everything. I mean that was dead wrong, because Yoko was definitely NOT living with my ex-wife in 'a very feminist relationship!' I see them all, because I've got a clipping service and I get all the newspapers, and you can bet your life somebody's going to send you the clippings..."

Q: "Yeah, your friends..."

JOHN: "Yes, all your best friends let you know what's going on. I was trying to put it 'round that I was gay, you know-- I thought that would throw them off... dancing at all the gay clubs in Los Angeles, flirting with the boys... but it never got off the ground."

Q: "I think I've only heard that lately about Paul."

JOHN: "Oh, I've had him, he's no good."

(laughter)

Q: "What is this about recording with David Bowie?"

JOHN: Well he was doing 'Across The Universe' and I had sort of met him once in L.A. and met him again here. That was an old song of mine. I gave it away because we had made a lousy version of it, and then Spector made an improved lousy version of it and it ended up on the 'Let It Be' LP which none of us would have anything to do with. So I just went down to Electric

whatever where he was recording and I did whatever you do. Then he, or the guitarist, had this sort of a lick... and we made a song out of it called 'Fame.' It's an interesting track. So that's the extent of it, and they'll be on his new album-- the one with 'Young Americans' on it."

Q: "I'd like to clear up one of those myths... about Brian Epstein 'packaging' the Beatles. How true is that?"

JOHN: "Everything is true and not true about everything. I mean, we certainly weren't naive. We were no more naive than was he. So Epstein was serving in a record shop and he had nothing to do, and he saw these sort of rockers, greasers, seeming greasers playing loud music and alot of kids paying attention to it. And he thought, well this is a business to be in. And he liked it-- he liked the look of it. He wanted to manage us and we had nobody better so we said alright you can do it. Then he went around shopping, getting us work. And it got to a point where he said 'Look, if you cut your hair you'll get this,' for then it was longer than any of the photographs. It was generally cut or trimmed for the photographs-- like in your school photographs your hair was cut the day before, or when you had a holiday somehow your parents always managed to cut your hair. But there were some private pictures that show it was pretty long for those days, and greased back, hanging around. But there was alot of long hair on the teddy boys, the Tony Curtises that grew larger and larger because they never went to the hairdresser. We were pretty greasy. Outside of Liverpool, when we went down South in our leather outfits, the dance hall promoters didn't really like us-- they thought we looked like a gang of thugs. So it got to be like Epstein said, 'Look, if you wear a suit...' and everybody wanted a good suit, you know. A nice, sharp, black suit, man... We liked the leather and the jeans but we wanted a good suit, even to wear offstage. 'Yeah, man, I'll have a suit!' So if you wore a suit, you'll get this much money... Alright I'll wear a suit. I'll wear a fucking balloon if somebody's going to pay me. I'm not in love with the leather THAT much. Wear a suit, you'll get more money."

"But he was our salesman, our front. You'll notice thaqt another quirk of life is-- I may have read this somewhere-- but self-made men usually have someone with education to front for them... to deal with all the other people with education. Now Epstein had enough education to go in and deal with the hobnobs... and it's the same thing now, if I have a lawsuit, I have to get a lawyer. Epstein fronted for the Beatles, and he played a great part at whatever he did. He was theatrical, that was for sure, and he believed in us. But he certainly didn't package us the way they say he packaged us. He was good at his job, to an extent. He wasn't the greatest businessman. But you have to look at this-- If he was such a great packager, so clever at packaging products,

whatever happened to Gerry and the Pacemakers, Cilla Black, and all the other packages? Where are they? Where are those packages? Only one package survived, the original package. It was a mutual deal. You want to manage us? Okay, we'll let you. We ALLOW you to. We weren't picked up off the street... we allowed him to take us. Paul wasn't that keen, but he's more conservative the way he approaches things. He even says that, it's nothing he denies. And that's all well and good, maybe he'll end up with more yachts. But we allowed Epstein to package us, it wasn't the other way around. And the real answer to that question is where are all the other packages? And that goes for all the other myths about people creating us or doing things for us."

Q: "Did you go to Allen Klein because of the Rolling Stones?"

JOHN: "Well, I reckoned Klein was alright because of the Stones. I thought Mick was together-- See, this is the fallacy. Everyone always thinks everyone else is together. You're either together yourself or forget it. I remember asking Mick what Klein was like, and he said, 'He's alright, but it's hard to get your hands on the money.' And even though my instincts were screaming, my intellect thought-- that must mean that he doesn't allow you to waste it or spend it, maybe that's good."

Q: "You should always go by instincts..."

JOHN: "I know. I'm trying to learn. It's a hard thing to learn after being programmed for life not to use your instincts, you know. Women use them a bit more than men-- you're allowed. One benefit you got from slavery was that you were emotional... that's cool. But men were supposed to make decisions on reason and intellect, so it interfered with your instinct. But my instinct is what has always saved me from lots of dragons."

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